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ABSTRACT

The Semester Goals Project was initiated as a result of residence hall staff observations that although some students did very well academically, they were not fulfilling other developmental tasks common to college students. The project was initiated with the goal of having students determine the specific behavior goals for a given semester. Student staff in the residence halls acted as resource personnel and contact persons for the students involved in the project. The evaluation of the project showed numerous anticipated and unanticipated benefits to both students and staff. The program forced the students to examine their goals and objectives, and make them aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses. Generally, it improved their self-understanding and, through their self-determined goals, made them more responsible for their own learning. In regard to student-staff relations, the program greatly improved the staff member's understanding of the individual participants, and, therefore, greatly improved relations on the floor. The author discusses in detail how the program was initially established. (Author/PC)

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Program presented at the A.C.P.A. Convention, March 5-8, 1975, Atlanta, Ga.

Title: Semester Goals Project

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Please allow me to present a short history of how we came to use a goal setting project at Iona College. In examining our adoption of this type of program, I believe you may see circumstances and situations which may exist at your own institutions in which such a program could be productive.

The semester goals project was initiated at Iona College as a result of residence hall staff observations that although some students did very well academically they were not fulfilling other developmental tasks common to college students, and vice-versa. It was also decided that this situation could not be rectified by large group methods or by a single non-continuing effort. It was determined that in order to change this situation the major effort must be made on the part of the students and not the staff. This was perceived as a situation where suggestions were useless unless the major effort was student initiated and directed. The developmental opportunities were available, the staff to suggest the appropriate choices was available, but the students were not choosing to become involved. The situation was viewed as one where the students were not making maximum use of their talents and opportunities and where the staff had no formal means of indirectly suggesting constructive activities that might aid in their development. Consequently, some method was sought whereby students would be encouraged to direct their own development by selecting educational experiences that would meet their needs. A goal setting program was adopted as the most viable means of achieving this objective.

The project was initiated with the goal of having students determining the specific behaviors toward which they wished to strive during a given semester.

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In order to achieve this situation several steps were necessary. The first step necessary was to have the individual student state the general outcome expected as a result of his or her behavior and efforts during a semester period. The focus at this point is not on the process but on the expected outcomes of that process. The second step is to have the student determine specific objectives consistent with the overall goal. Here the focus is on the process necessary to achieve the overall goal. The third step and that which is most basic to the success of the project is that students must become aware of their personal strengths, weaknesses, and values. Unless this information is established the foundation for failure and self-deception is laid before the project has even begun. Allow me to give an example of the steps that have just been mentioned. A student selects as a goal that she is going to achieve the Dean's list during the next semester. Her specific objective is to improve her grades in two humanities courses she has that semester. She is a biology major. She indicates that she will invest more time in her humanities courses this semester.

Up until this point the goal setting procedure has been fairly mechanical. However, it is here that the staff member must encourage the student to examine the reason why she has not been successful in humanities courses. The answer may be a simple lack of time devoted to the subject or incompletion of the assigned readings. Moreover, the problem may be a lack of training in taking essay examinations, a low regard for the usefulness of the material in question, or merely poor study habits. Consequently, it is at this point that the input and collaboration of the staff is essential. The staff member must attempt to focus the attention of the student on the deficiency that requires some resolution while interacting in a way which will assure that the student takes responsibility for the decisions involved in the goal setting process.

In other words the primary function of the goal setting program is to have the student establish guidelines for planned development with the staff suggesting methods by which the development may be accomplished within the guidelines established. The staff member, however, must examine the goals and objectives set by the student in regard to that students's abilities and deficiences in order to insure that they are reasonable and achievable, and that they may be accomplished within the given period.

The Goal Setting Project resulted in numerous anticipated and unanticipated benefits to both students and staff. The program forced the students to examine their goals and objectives. It made them aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses. It generally improved their self-understanding and through their self-determined goals made them a bit more responsible for their own learning. It served as a valuable source of positive reinforcement for its participants, and it provided them with a method of assessing their personal growth and development in terms they could understand. The program also served as an alternate method of measuring individual achievement. In regard to student-staff relations, the program not only improved the staff member's understanding of the individual participant, but it also had substantial effect of improving student-staff relations. It did so in that it was a non-punitive, helping relationship which offered the staff member an opportunity for interaction on a subject of major importance to the student on a continuing basis. I believe I can also state that through the establishment of short, intermediate and long-range goals by students, not only were they able to assess their progress and development, but the staff was able to assess the effectiveness of their approaches in meeting the needs of students.

Establishing a student goal setting program requires a minimal amount of time and effort. The program requires no extraordinary funding, and the only

actual costs involved are those of duplicating cipies of instructions. Therefore, this type of program can be employed by all typed of institutions and at varying levels of involvement. The program could be employed throughout an entire institution or used successfully by only one floor of a residence hall. Consequently, the program could be of value in any situation where students and staff are willing to become involved and to invest the necessary time and effort. The time demanded of each floor counselor or resident assistant at a maximum is about three hours and ten minutes per resident per semester.

How is the Program Established?

1. First, the staff receives training in the highly individualized nature of goal setting, and the interview techniques necessary for teaching students how to establish general goals and to write specific objectives. This phase of the project must be completed before all else. The staff must have a working knowledge of the process of goal setting for the project to succeed.

2. Second, at a group meeting (floor or building) at the beginning of the semester the project is explained and simple forms and instructions are distributed. The project can be mandatory or voluntary. I would suggest that better results will be achieved with a voluntary program.

3. Third, the student who wishes to participate completes the form and gives one copy to his Floor Counselor or Resident Assistant.

4. Fourth, the staff member then discusses the student's goals with him or her. The focus should be on whether the goals set are reasonable, that is, can they be accomplished. What specific objectives must be achieved to accomplish the goals? What skills are necessary to fulfill the objectives and whether or not the participant is deficient in any of those skills?

5. The pair meets again at mid-summer to review the student's progress toward the goals previously set.

6. The pair meets again at the end of the semester for an evaluation of how and why the goals set were or were not achieved.

The final step of the project, the evaluation procedure, is extremely important for both the students and staff participating in the program. At this point the student must assess his failure or success in reaching his goals, and determine the specific behavior that caused him to do so. Even if he has not completely reached his stated goal he should determine how far he has progressed and what development was achieved.

The staff member at this point has the responsibility of insuring that the student makes an honest evaluation of his progress. By this I mean that the student is not permitted to either rationalize his failures or exaggerate his accomplishments. The staff member must review the evaluation with the knowledge that the results of this procedure will form the basis for the next goal-setting project. It is important to take note that if this procedure is completed correctly a student will be able to learn a great deal about himself and his pace of development.